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Chinese Porcelains

The Chinese porcelains are now gathered together in the eastern end of the building. They consist of three groups—the Bloomfield Moore, the Dr. Francis W. Lewis and the general Museum collections. Among these are many beautiful pieces, illustrating the various periods and styles of Chinese ceramic art.

There is perhaps no branch of the potter's art that presents greater difficulties in an attempt at classification than are encountered in the study of Oriental porcelains. The earliest writers on the subject have attributed to these products a most remote and impossible antiquity, and subsequent authors have blindly and unquestioningly followed in their steps. By means of unreliable marks and predominating colors in the decorations, an arbitrary, not to say puerile, system of classification has been built up, which has been almost universally used by collectors down to the present time. By means of their dates and marks, porcelains have been attributed to certain dynasties or periods, some of which reach back many centuries beyond

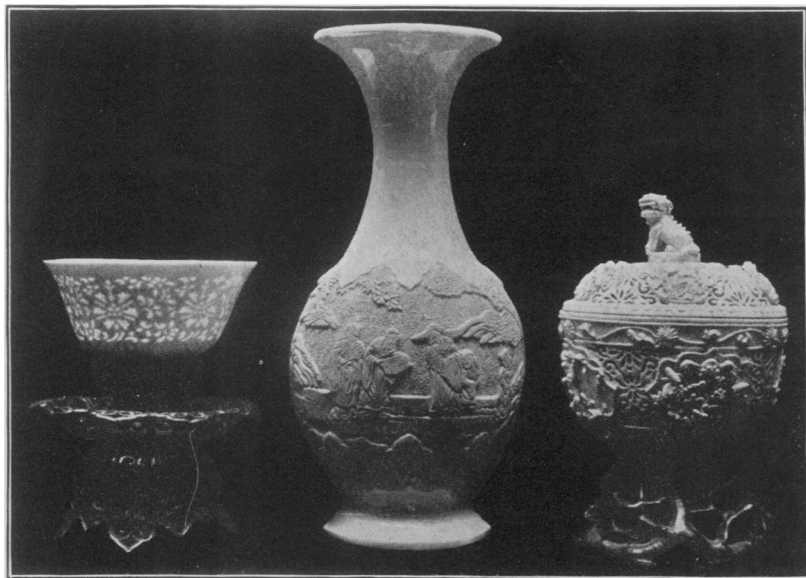
equal propriety in systematizing the products of other countries? Why not take, for instance, the wares of the English potteries and group them according to their predominating colors—the porcelains with red glazes or decorations, from Worcester, Chelsea, Bristol, etc., together—instead of arranging them according to factories and by distinctive styles of decoration? Such a classification would be considered ridiculous in the extreme.

The greatest difficulty encountered in classifying the Chinese wares is occasioned by our lack of information relative to the factories where they were produced. Very little is known regarding the thousands of potteries which have been operated in various parts of the Celestial Empire through several centuries, and still less concerning the potters themselves. In the city of King-teh-chin alone, in the province of Kiang-si, it is said there were three thousand porcelain furnaces early in the eighteenth century. The classification employed for other countries cannot, therefore, be followed in the arrangement of Chinese wares, and it is necessary to resort to some other method, which must be a combination of the above-mentioned systems.

What is known as Chinese porcelain is extremely variable in composition and appearance, ranging, by slight gradations, through the most translucent to the most opaque bodies, including fabrics of the finest texture and those of the coarsest quality, which should more properly be classed as stoneware. Some of the delicate egg-shell porcelain is exceedingly translucent, while, on the other hand, we find wares which, even when tolerably thin, are absolutely opaque, while many of the heavier pieces, although they bear the most artistic decorations and colorings, are crude and coarse in body. A large proportion of what goes by the names of Chinese porcelain is in reality the coarsest stoneware covered with porcelain glaze.

It would seem, therefore, that the only natural classification which can be adopted for these so-called porcelains is according to distinct and marked styles of decorative treatment. They may be grouped into four genera or divisions:—Those pieces devoid of colored decorations; those decorated with *flat* colors; those with *enamel* (or slightly relief) colors on the glaze, and those

covered with colored glazes, including all of the color families. To the first division belong the white crackles, the pierced or rice-grain varieties and those pieces whose only ornamentation consists of carving and modeling. To the second class belong those which have painted decorations in flat colors, including the blues and those styles of Chinese porcelain improperly called "Lowestoft." To the third group belong those which are painted in vitrified colors or enamel, the most numerous of all, including the "Chrysanthemo-Paeonian" family of Albert Jacquemart, while to the fourth division belong the solid glazes, such as rose, mustard yellow, apple green, coral red, *sang-de-boeuf*, or ox blood, peach blow, purple splash, etc. Each of these genera may be divided into subdivisions, as, for instance, that class of blue and white ware of the second division, which may again be separated into characteristic patterns, such as the hawthorn, the dragon, the willow, the mandarin, etc.



CHINESE PORCELAIN, WHITE

1. Rice-Grain Bowl. 2. Carved Vase. 3. Modeled Bowl, applied Ornamentations.
Dr. Francis W. Lewis Collection.

the Christian era. It has been discovered, however, that many of these marks have been employed at various times; that they have been copied and recopied, even on the modern wares, so that they can no longer be considered trustworthy. The older products, with their marks, have been so carefully reproduced by Chinese potters that experts are often unable to distinguish between the original pieces and their later copies. A purely chronological classification has, therefore, become impossible; nor is this of any great importance, since many of the later pieces are fully equal, in body, in glaze, in color and decorative treatment, to their older models.

The system of classing these porcelains by color, whereby they are grouped by some writers into families, such as the "Green" family, the "Rose" family, etc., is childish and unsatisfactory. If such a system can properly be used in the classification of Oriental wares, why should it not be employed with

It may be objected that there are some other varieties of Chinese porcelain which may not strictly find a place in the above-suggested classification, such, for instance, as certain of

white blossoms on deep blue and the right-hand vase white flowers on a black ground.

Objection may be raised to the system of classification suggested above by those who hold to the ideas of the first European writers on the subject, yet we believe it will be the one which must be generally used eventually by the majority of public museums, just as it has been adopted by the Pennsylvania Museum.



CHINESE PORCELAIN VASES.—HAWTHORN PATTERN

1. White and Green on Red Ground.
 2. White Flowers on Dark Blue.
 3. White on Black.
- Bloomfield Moore Collection.

the crackles and the celadon glazes. The former include those white wares with black, gray and pink surface crackling; also, the solidly colored glazes, such as yellow, green, blue, etc., with crackled effects. The former of these should be placed in the first division, and the latter should be placed in the fourth.

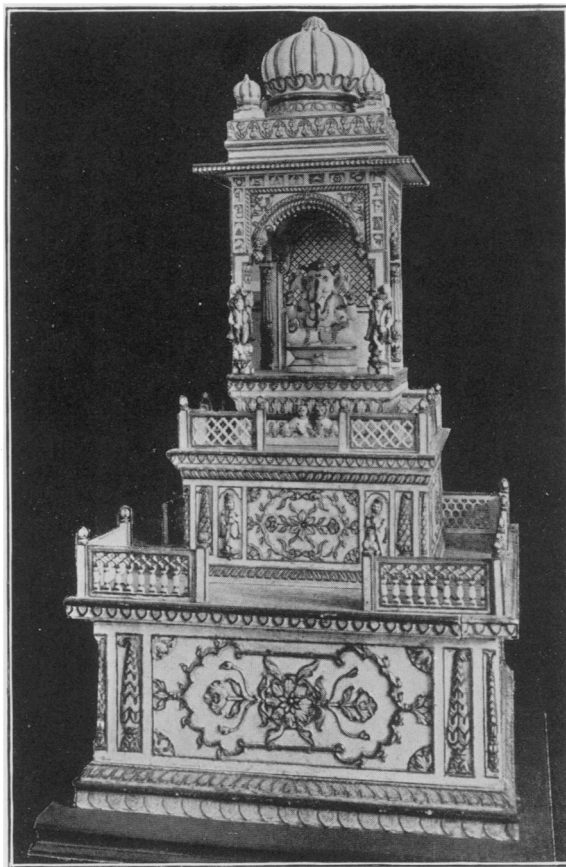
The celadon pieces consist of several varieties—first, those of plain form, entirely covered with the peculiar greenish-tinted glaze; second, those pieces which have been modeled and pierced, and, third, those with zones or panels of celadon glaze in combination with painted or other decorations. It would not seem to be improper to distribute these varieties of celadon glaze through the different divisions with reference to their predominating characteristics, placing the first and second groups in the fourth division, and the third group in the second or third division, as may be found proper.

The greatest error which collectors have fallen into is the attributing of too great an antiquity to Chinese porcelains. Dr. Prime, in his "Pottery and Porcelain of all Nations," asserts that we have nothing which can be depended upon as genuine of an older date than the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. It is extremely doubtful if any fully authenticated pieces will be found to date back even that far. It is reasonably certain that all wares which can be proved to be older than the fourteenth century are pottery or stoneware, and not true porcelain.

Two groups of Chinese porcelain in the Museum are here illustrated. One consists of three pieces of white ware—a rice-grain bowl, a vase with a central zone of carved work without glaze and a covered bowl with modeled or applied ornamentation. The other group consists of three pieces, illustrating distinct varieties of the hawthorn pattern—the one on the left having white and green flowers on coral red; the central jar,

An Oriental Shrine

At the right of the entrance to the Museum may be seen an East Indian street shrine, made of white Jeypore marble, colored and gilded and handsomely carved. It consists of three terraces surmounted by a dome. Within the inclosure of the third or upper terrace is a figure of Ganesha, the elephant-headed God of Wisdom of the Hindus, to which the natives pray and offer oblations. This exceedingly interesting and ornate object was exhibited at the Chicago Exposition of 1893, where it was secured by Miss Lydia T. Morris, who presented it to the Museum.



MARBLE STREET SHRINE, INDIA
Given by Miss Lydia T. Morris.